

An Elston-Fright Tale: A Girl Called Corpse

AUTHOR

REECE CARTER

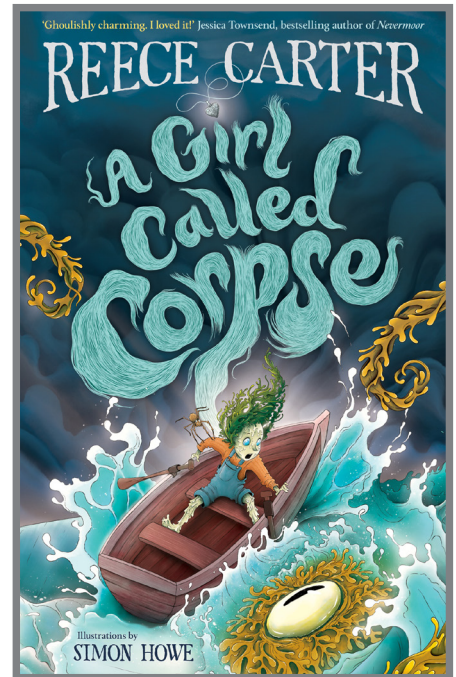
ILLUSTRATOR

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SCIS: 5421578

ISBN: 9781761066788

RECOMMENDED FOR: Upper Primary



SYNOPSIS

'Find the thing the Witches call a treasure,' says Old Man, 'and you'll get back all those memories you're missing.'

With a body made of wax, seaweed for hair and polished abalone shells for eyes, Corpse is bound to haunt the Witches' sea shack forever. She has no memory of the kid she was before she was snatched and ended up on the rock-that-doesn't-exist. But the delivery of an unexpected message sets Corpse off on a surprising quest, searching for answers to the old and familiar questions that have filled her not-brain since the day she first woke up a ghost. Questions about her name. Questions about her family. With only her eight-legged friend Simon for company, Corpse heads into the unknown. There will be danger—cruel Witches, a silver-eyed sea monster and a cunning Merchant with a hungry grin—but Corpse is not afraid. She'll stop at nothing to uncover the truth about her past. Only some answers, it turns out, are much closer than she thinks.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Reece Carter grew up on his family farm in Tammin, Western Australia. There was an unfortunate lack of witches and ghosts though, so Reece had to find them in books instead. Roald Dahl, Paul Jennings and Emily Rodda were some of his first favourite authors. When Reece moved away to boarding school at the age of eleven, he could regularly be found hiding in the library, tucked away in the corner with a good book. With the encouragement of his English teacher, Reece started writing his own stories. After a few years travelling overseas, Reece moved to Melbourne. But even while working as a nutritionist by day, Reece maintained a secret double life, continuing to write middle-grade novels by night. Now, he lives in Sydney and writes kids' fiction full-time. When not reading or writing, Reece can usually be found talking to his dog Hagrid—and hoping that one of these days Hagrid might decide to talk back. *A Girl Called Corpse* is his debut novel.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Simon Howe is a picture book illustrator and animator. His picture books include *On My Way*, written by Sophie Masson, *Perfect Little Monster*, written by Penny Morrison, and *Bold Tales For Brave-Hearted Boys*, written by Susannah McFarlane. He also worked on the *Naughty Dragons* series.

He regularly works with much-loved children's band, Teeny Tiny Stevies, designing and animating their music videos. Their second album, *Helpful Songs For Little People*, was picked up by ABC Music, and all of the animated videos are now screened frequently on ABC Kids Television.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, examine the image on the front cover of the novel and write a short paragraph to explain your reaction to it. Answer the following questions to guide you in your response:
 - What mood does the image create?
 - How does the word Corpse make you feel when you see it in the title? Does it contrast with the other words in the title, *A Girl Called*? Why do you think the author chose this title? Does it make you want to read the story more or less?
 - What genre of book do you expect with an image such as this?
 - What sort of events do you think might occur in the novel?
- After finishing the novel, go back to this paragraph to see whether your predictions of genre and events were correct.
- What is the purpose of a prologue? What aspects of 'Zero' are prologue-like? Did 'Zero' set a mood for you that made you want to read on? How did the final paragraphs of 'Zero' make you feel when Corpse speaks directly to the reader about what to do if you find yourself near the rock-that-doesn't-exist and the town-that-nobody-visits?
- The story is written from Corpse's perspective in first-person, meaning that the reader relies on Corpse to explain everything to us as she discovers it. What is the effect when suddenly Corpse withholds information from us because of her shock?
- 'I pluck the amber sea glass from earlier out of my pocket and place it on top of the pile, then collect up my favourite belonging of all...When I tuck the button in my pocket, the pain eases.' (pp 35–36) Foreshadowing is a device used to build an air of mystery in a story. Would you describe Corpse's black button as an example of foreshadowing? Why or why not?
- 'Film and television series are rife with cliffhangers. In fact, the term "cliffhanger" originated in the 1930s, when cliffhangers kept movie-goers coming back to the theatre for serialized films, which were released in short consecutive sections each week. The film serial *The Perils of Pauline*, for example, would often end with the film's protagonist on the edge of a cliff – literally.' (Source: Masterclass.com) Find three examples of chapters ending with a cliffhanger in *A Girl Called Corpse*. Explain how each surprised you, making you want to continue reading.
- 'We're past the reef and over sand. The water is deeper here, and the distance between us and the shore is shrinking ... That's when the dinghy explodes.' (pp 57-61) Find instances in this extract where alliteration, simile, repetition, onomatopoeia, personification and dramatic contrast heighten the intensity of the scene involving Corpse, Simon and the sea monster.
- Why do you think the author, Reece Carter, decided to give a spider the only human name in the novel (if you don't count Flip as a name)? Do you think the reading experience is richer when Simon only communicates via a click sound? Might that have something to do with the reader filling in the gaps in the conversations between Corpse and Simon?
- Reece Carter creates linguistic reversals by inserting the prefix un- before otherwise regular words, such as in 'the Ungeneral Store'. The prefix not- is also used widely: for instance, Corpse's wax body contains a *not*-heart, a *not*-brain and a *not*-stomach. Nevertheless, Corpse still has feelings in these not-parts. What is the effect of these reversals? Do you enjoy it when you come across instances in the novel? Do you think they add to the magical atmosphere? Do you find them funny?
 - Make up your own new words to describe a magical world by adding the prefixes un- and not- to regular words.
- Reversals of reality and reader expectation add to the magic in *A Girl Called Corpse*. The landscape contains both a rock-that-doesn't-exist and a town-that-nobody-visits. The witches in the text are men and the Merchant is a woman. Simon the huntsman spider is brave when everyone knows spiders 'are supposed to be afraid of everything.' (p 258) Find other examples of reversals in *A Girl Called Corpse*. What is your favourite?
 - What is the expectation or reality that is being reversed?
 - What are the effects of such reversals?
 - Do the reversals make the world in the story strange and new to you?
 - Do you enjoy them? Do they annoy you? Do they make you laugh?

- Come up with some paragraphs to reverse reality in our world and create a more magical, topsy-turvy and downside-up world.
- An enchantment is a spell that uses a chant to manifest magic. Chants are rhythmic and elicit emotion. Rhyme underscores rhythm and is an effective mnemonic device (a system such as a pattern of letters, ideas, or associations which assists in remembering something). Examine the rhyme and rhythm of the three spells Corpse casts: the sticking spell, the fire hex (pp 33–34), and the beckoning charm (page 36). Do the choice of noun and verb increase the mystery and magic of each spell? Compare and contrast these spells with those recited by the witches in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* below:

‘Double, double toil and trouble;
 Fire burn and cauldron bubble.
 Fillet of a fenny snake,
 In the caldron boil and bake;
 Eye of newt and toe of frog,
 Wool of bat and tongue of dog,
 Adder’s fork and blind-worm’s sting,
 Lizard’s leg and howlet’s wing,
 For a charm of powerful trouble,
 Like a hell-broth boil and bubble.’
- Create your own enchantments and share them with your class. Did the rhymes and rhythm help you to remember it?
- Create your own classroom book of spells like the witches’ book of spells, the *Magikal Maledictions*. The book can be either handwritten and hand-bound, or created on the computer. And make sure you illustrate the spells.
- Corpse’s body is made of wax, and her body-parts are recycled from the rock-that-doesn’t-exist. Create a character by exploring your school playground to find objects that could be recycled as body parts. What body part will they replace? What made you choose the objects?
 - Write a short story featuring the character and have them describe, in first person, how it feels to be made of these objects. What is good about the recycled body parts and what is a problem?
- Reece Carter describes *A Girl Called Corpse* as ‘a ghost story ... that is really about three things: friendship, family and love.’ Write a paragraph for each of the three themes to explain how it is explored in the story.
- Did the introduction of the father and mother at the very end of the story surprise you? Did it confirm what you thought you already knew of Corpse’s family or create a new and unexpected twist? How was the mystery of Corpse’s beloved black button—first mentioned on pp 35–36—resolved here?